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THE
PRESENT STATE
OF THE
BRITISH CONSTITUTION;
DEDUCED FROM FACTS.

K

BY AN OLD WHIG.

*Nec reparare Novas Vires, Multumque priori
Credere Fortunæ; Stat magni nominis Umbra.*

LUCAN.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. S. JORDAN, NO. 166, FLEET-STREET.

1793.

THE BRITISH STATE

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T O

THE HONOURABLE

THOMAS ERSKINE.

WHOM can this little work with more propriety own for its patron, than the person to whose exertions in the cause of Liberty it owes perhaps its existence, certainly its security. Without your generous and patriotic efforts the fate of a writer, who presumed to treat of the mysteries of Government, depended upon the arbitrary will of a Chief Justice, instead of the unbiassed suffrages of his Fellow-Citizens.

I am,

SIR,

With profound respect,

THE AUTHOR.

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IT is the peculiar glory of Englishmen to enjoy a constitution which has been the wonder and envy of surrounding nations. To undertake a regular proof of its various excellencies would be a task equally trite and useless; since the security of person and property; the internal tranquillity; the extended commerce; the pre-eminence of arts and manufactures, which have uninterruptedly existed for more than a century in this country, are irrefragable arguments of the truth of the position. To what cause can this almost unexampled prosperity be referred, except to the singular formation of its constitution? which, to use the just definition of Paley, is, so much of its law, as relates to the designation and form of the legislature.* To prevent those

* This definition of Constitution, is conformable to the common use of the word. Germany, Russia, and even Turkey, have their constitutions, however despotic may be their governments. Mr. Paine favours us with a definition entirely different, and as applied to this subject, entirely new.

destructive contests, which arise in states, where every third or seventh year beholds new men invested with the supreme magistracy, and those periodical scenes of bloodshed and misery, which ensue under elective monarchies, the executive Power is made hereditary. It is further invested with all those attributes of perfection and inviolability, which command the respect and insures the obedience of the multitude; it is endowed with prerogatives which can scarcely be employed but for the public welfare, calculated to preserve order and tranquillity at home, and to exert vigour, secrecy, and dispatch in our transactions abroad. Next, principally to maintain a due controul over the democratic part, which the recent experience of a neighbouring nation shews, ought necessarily to exist somewhere in every well governed state, a council is established chiefly hereditary, but partly elective; it is composed of Prelates renowned for their piety and learning, Lawyers distinguished by their professional merits, Statesmen advanced for their honourable services, and a long train of illustrious Nobles who derive their claims to hereditary legislation from the most ancient and venerable origin. Such men are formed by their education, interested by their property, and bound by their conscience, both to discharge the solemn trust reposed in them of the dernier appeal from all inferior jurisdictions with
the

the strictest impartiality, and maturest deliberation; and to exercise the glorious privilege of mediating between the throne, and the people, by checking, on the one hand, the insidious usurpation of prerogative, and counteracting, on the other, the wild encroachments of democracy. Nor is the republican part of the constitution less wisely and vigilantly formed, since every district of the empire enjoys the privilege of sending representatives to parliament; and men of all orders and professions, interested by their property, and experienced in the occupation of their respective pursuits, obtain seats in the grand council of the nation. And as in their hands taxation, the grand engine of government, is placed by the constitution, the people of England possess the rare felicity of not being subjected to any pecuniary burden, which is not imposed with the consent of their representatives. Thus our constitution happily unites the advantages of the three species of government, to which all others are in fact reducible, and is fortunately exempt from their defects. We enjoy the strength, energy, and secrecy of monarchical councils without feeling the capricious violence of despotism; we have the wisdom of aristocracy, without suffering from that haughty, and exclusive spirit, which too often characterises privileged orders; and we can boast the zeal, eloquence, and independence of a de-

mocracy, without being exposed to the fermentation of passions, with the folly of contrivance, and weakness of execution, which are usually inseparable from the measures of popular assemblies.

Such is the outline of the British constitution, as delineated by the masterly hand of a Somers, at the memorable æra of the revolution; and had future artists been content with following the traces of his pencil, they would have preferred the natural un sullied hue of freedom animated by virtue, to the gaudy and dazzling colours of corruption, with which the piece is so disgustingly overcharged.

But while theory informs us that we are free, and in conformation of her doctrine points to three estates so happily equipoised, and forming so goodly a system of mutual counteraction, experience answers that there is a baneful disease called *influence*, which has unaccountably crept in, and which, after having gradually destroyed the vigour of our constitution, is now actually preying upon its vitals. Hence the majority of the commons are no longer freely chosen by the suffrages of the people; a borough is transferred with as much publicity and as little ceremony, from one proprietor to another, as a common freehold; the price of a seat in parliament is as well known and as arithmetically calculated as the value of land; and even men who have respectable characters to lose, are not ashamed

to

to employ the most sordid arts of venality without the pains of concealment in the ignominious traffic. And what is still worse, this confederacy is far more pernicious to civil liberty, than even those of Poland and Venice, since *there*, in case of any violent abuse of power, the people have the remedy of bringing their oppressors to justice from their notoriety ; but in a country where the criminality is divided among many, is sanctioned by custom, is fortified by prejudice, and operates without the risk of responsibility, the condition of the bulk of the nation is indeed hopeless. If this were the extent of the evil, there might be a source of consolation : were the component members of the aristocratic corps to use powers thus obtained, unbiassed and independent, it is probable that they might be sometimes exerted for the benefit of the public ; but, unhappily, these constitutional monopolists are, partly from motives of inclination, and partly from those of necessity, (which shall hereafter be explained) as much under the influence of the crown, as that pliant assembly, which is dignified with the name of Representation of the People. The executive power therefore may be said with truth to unite in itself the triple capacities of, taxation, legislation, and execution of the laws. The forms of Liberty are preserved, but the spirit has long since evaporated. We are
 nearly

nearly in the predicament of the Romans under Augustus, who permitted the old offices of the Republic to remain, but took care to conjoin them all in his own person. *In ejus unius Persona veteris Reipublicæ vis atque Majestas per cumulatas Magistratum Potestates exprimebatur*, says the civilian Gravina. It is true that he used this excessive authority with moderation, and promoted the happiness of the people; but the examples of his successors ought to strike every nation with a just terror, where similar powers are vested in one man; however his natural inclinations, congenial to those of our present amiable sovereign, may lead him to clemency and forbearance; and render him incapable of harbouring a thought, or adopting a persuasion detrimental to the welfare of his subjects.

That we may not be understood to rest this melancholy statement of our constitutional decipitude on vague assertions, and perverted facts, (though to say the truth, were we inclined to use that mode of supporting our positions, there are several very great writers on Government, now living to keep us in countenance) we shall begin with considering the actual composition of the Upper House, and we trust from this examination it will clearly appear that it is very different from what the Constitution intended, (a controlling and judicial assembly); and we shall perhaps be able to
discover

discover what emoluments are enjoyed, and what rewards are expected by those, who are thus honourably distinguished from their fellow citizens.

The noble Lords who enjoy places under Government, may be considered in two divisions; the first contains those whose offices are held at pleasure; the second, those whom custom esteems tenants for life. The peers at present holding offices at pleasure are, we believe, thirty-four.— We may perhaps be permitted to lay it down as a rule that of every class or profession which has to look up to the crown for its reward and emolument, two parts of three will be found the steady.* supporters of ministry. Bishops hitherto capable of translation are

26

Admirals in House of Lords

4

* In order to vindicate ourselves from the possible accusation of scandal or sedition, we adjoin a quotation from Paley, v. 2d, p. 228; " Our discussion relates solely to that influence " which results from the acceptance or expectation of public " preferments; nor does the influence which we speak of require any sacrifice of personal probity." We request that when, in the future pages of this Essay, we mention the terms corruption, influence, or bribery, we may be considered as implying no dishonest motive. When we assert that a noble Lord or an honourable Commoner is governed by a hope of place or pension, we only mean that interest has a secret bias on his mind, which actuates him unknown to himself.

Peers,

Peers, Generals and Colonels

18

Two thirds of —

48 is 32

34

32

Deduct 66 from 259, rem. 193

Though the remaining 193 peers cannot be said to follow any profession, yet when we view the long lists of governments, * embassies, fleets, regiments, rangerhips, stars, and garters for themselves†. The posts of lady of the bed-chamber, maid of honour, sempstresses, or clear-starcher for their wives and daughters. The sure promotions in the army, navy, and offices of government for their sons. The comfortable appointments they aim at for a pimping valet, or a cast-off mistress : we may perhaps, without any considerable rashness, expect that no very violent degree of opposition will be met with from two thirds of the number.

Ded. one third of 193. rem. 129

Placemen, Bishops, &c. 66

Deduct 195 from 259, rem. 64

* See farther particulars in the future pages.

† Go ask mankind, and Scoto now shall tell,
How trade encreases, and the world goes well;
Strike off his pension by the setting sun,
And England, if not Europe, is undone.

From

From the whole statement I conclude, that in the House of Peers the minister may at all times expect a majority of more than three to one.

We must next perform the ungrateful task of delineating the democratic part of our system; and I am afraid it wears so dubious a shape, that it would be difficult for one not used to that happy confusion of terms which prevails amongst our politicians, to distinguish it from what is esteemed its direct contrary.

Of our representatives, in number 558, 400 in England are returned for rotten boroughs, or for places under the patronage of individuals*. Of the mutilated representation with which Scotland is insulted, the condition is even worse. The boroughs, few of which have more than six electors, are all under the sway of aristocratic families, and treasury agents. And of the counties, where one would expect to find at least the shadow of independence, seven out of thirty are private property, and in those which remain apparently unsubjugated, the right of voting is so limited, such intrigue and feudal oppression yet remain, that their representatives may be said to receive the voice of influence and of power, instead of that of the people. We find that *one hundred and eighty seven* members of the house of Commons are elected under the *patrenage* of English peers. Amongst

* The principal information on this subject is derived from the History of Boroughs, a book replete with useful information.

those fortunate individuals who have obtained the envied privilege of being doubly and trebly represented, we find the following names; and the various appendages of these names sufficiently prove the extreme desirableness of this patronage.

Names.	Number of Representatives.	Honours.
Francis Ruffel	9.	Duke of Bedford, Marquis of Tavistock, Recorder of Bedford.
Charles Howard	8.	Duke of Norfolk, Earl of Surrey, Hereditary Earl Marshal, Lord Lieutenant, and Custos Rotulorum of the West Riding of Yorksh. Colonel of first Battalion of the West Riding Militia, Recorder of Gloucester, High Steward of Hereford, V.P. of Welsh Charity.
Henry Pelham Clinton	7.	Duke of Newcastle, Earl of Lincoln, Ld Lieut. Custos Rotulor. Steward, Keeper,

Names.	Number of Representatives.	Honours.
		Keeper, Guardian Auditor of Exche- quer, Knight of Garter, &c. &c. &c.
James Lowther	7.	In 1784, Baron Visc. Earl Lonsdale, Ld Lieut. and Custos Rot. of Counties Cumberland and Westmorland.
George Edgecumbe	6.	In 1784, Earl Edge- cumbe, Vis. Valle- tort, an Admiral, Lord Lieutenant, Custos Rot. joint ViceTreasurer, &c.
Edward Eliott Craggs	6.	In 1784, Ld Eliott, receiver General of Duchy of Cornwall

These few instances may serve as a specimen of the true road to wealth and honours.

We find there is nearly an equality in number between the deputies of nobility and the other representatives of rotten boroughs. It will not be unreasonable to conclude that, from the natural tendency every man of quality must feel to attach himself to the throne, the source of his envied distinctions : from the value which is set on these

distinctions, by men who do not possess them, but whose opulence and interest gives them a claim to future possession ; of the number of those elected for such boroughs, three parts in four at least will give their sanction to the governing power. *Here, then, alone is a decided majority of the whole House of Commons.*

Of the *ostensible** places enjoyed by members of the House of Commons, great part of them held at pleasure, the number is upwards of ninety. In this calculation the great officers of the army and navy are included. And further, the num-

* The pensions on the civil list amount to upwards of one hundred thousand pounds a year. We have no reason to suppose this immense sum expended without *prudence* and *effect*. The following statement, though more immediately referring to another house, we believe may be made here without any considerable impropriety. The promotions and creations in the peerage of England and Ireland during Mr. Pitt's administration, are (royal and extinct titles omitted)

English 54

Irish 48

102

Here is much reward, and there doubtless have been corresponding services. Can we wonder at the almost unanimous approbation of Mr. Pitt's vigorous ministry ?

Further we would beg leave to ask, if places, held under a fictitious name, are *few in number* or *unworthy attention*. It might not be found convenient to hold out to public view a majority of the House of Commons *plainly, openly, directly pensioned*.

ber

ber of places of emolument and honour which may be held by members of the house of Commons, are more than double the whole amount of popular representation. And we may rest assured, that the competitors for future places, together with the present placemen, whom gratitude or expectation attach to present measures, will form so numerous a body, as alone to ensure the majority to any minister.

If we consider, therefore, the house in two points of view, we shall find liberty equally in danger: if as representatives of rotten boroughs, an aristocratic tendency secures the majority to the crown; if as possessors of places, as competitors for reversions, pensions, and peerages, a new and equally formidable majority presents itself. But when, as has always been the case, these two majorities are united and knit together by the cementing influence of the crown, the force of corruption becomes irresistible. Here, perhaps, some *fautor veterum*, one who without any reference to experience derives his ideas of the British constitution solely from the romances of Blackstone and De Lolme, will exclaim; "Are there not then some districts which still maintain their claim inviolate to independence; is not the glorious struggle of Westminster in favour of the Whig interest, a standing confutation of your argument?" I will admit that at first sight the
victories

victories now and then gained by the inhabitants of these places over the treasury appear favourable to the cause of liberty ; but when it is considered that they are obtained by the expenditure of immense sums ; by contaminating the morals of the people ; by suspending industry ; by reducing families to beggary ; by always endangering, and often destroying the lives of citizens ; and that the object of such contests is not to place a deserving man in the legislative body, or to accomplish some beneficial alteration in the system, but merely to gratify the ambition and pique of some aristocratic house, which has been refused * a government or an embassy ; a lover of his country cannot but exclaim with Pyrrhus, " Such another victory, were worse than a defeat."

Such being the history of our representations, such our house of peers, we are told by many that our national happiness is complete. Reform is construed into sedition, and corruption exalted into the brightest jewel of the constitution. I allow our ministers to be great men, and I hope they are honest men. Yet what is to be expected from ministers acting almost without control, but the exaltation of that privilege concurrent with

* If we advert to those sudden changes which are so repeatedly taking place in both houses, we shall invariably find a coincident disappointment ; how far these contemporaneous circumstances may be connected, we do not presume to determine.

which

which their own authority rises ? What is to be expected from placemen and pensioners, but an extension of that system of corruption by which they live ? What is to be expected from an aristocracy titled or untitled, landed or monied, but degradation and oppression of the lower orders ? We trust an examination into the various departments civil, military, and ecclesiastical, will fully confirm our assertions. In the scheme of taxation a statement of a few facts will be sufficient.

In the commutation tax, the duty on each window is increased, as the whole number of windows encreases, 'till such a number is arrived at as might make an inconvenient charge on the palace of some noble lord. If an honest shopkeeper chuses to admit a little more light into his house, he has not only the additional window to pay for, but an encreased duty on all the old ones. If a duke piles wing upon wing, and adds window to window, when once the stated number is passed, his grace is bound by no paltry restraint of tax. In the case of men servants, the tax on each is encreased as in the case of windows. A gentleman who keeps four servants pays thirty shillings per annum each ; one who keeps eleven pays 3 l. each : but if instead of ten there were thirty, still no more than 3 l. per annum is paid for each.

No commutation tax is paid for more than two houses. All which taxes demonstrate the detestable

able principle of lessening the burdens of the most opulent.

In the following statement of the army and navy, the towering influence of aristocracy is completely evident. Of our generals thirty-six, of our colonels thirty-one, of our admirals ten, are peers or peers sons; of our captains in the navy twenty-one are noble or honourable; as in a list of about sixteen hundred lieutenants of the royal navy, I only find eight honourable names, I suppose it is the custom for that inferior degree to be altogether omitted, or passed through merely as a form. The absolute number of beneficed nobles is not great; but when we consider the small proportion which noble families bear to ignoble ones, we shall find that thirty-six generals out of about one hundred and fifty; thirty-one colonels out of about one hundred; and ten admirals out of fifty, make no small proportion of the whole. We must further call to mind that the near collateral relations of nobility are not included in the above list; and when we reflect on their numbers and their poverty, their pride, which scornfully rejects all commercial pursuits, and the necessity of a ministerial majority in the upper house, we may fairly presume that one half of the remaining post of honour are divided among them. Perhaps no sentiment exists more forcibly in the human mind, than a
jealousy

jealousy of the controul, an impatience of submitting to the command of those we have regarded as our equals, or our inferiors. Our rapid * military promotion inflicts in the breasts of those who are not preferred, because they are not great, as keen a wound as inventive malice could devise. We have heard some arguers shamefully insinuate, that with all these disadvantages, we have even a surplus of candidates for admission into the navy and army. What? is it right, because from holding out a deluding picture of elegant manners, gay society, a fancied emancipation from all the sorrows of life, we *can* entrap a thoughtless unwary youth, we therefore ought to do it? Let us penetrate behind this gaudy external, and we shall see our officers miserably poor †; immersed without power of retreat in a continued round of thoughtless dissipation; disappointment of promotion perpetually harrassing their minds; and to conclude all, the cutting reflection, that they must bow to the happier for-

* A young nobleman, who only finished his academical career in the year 1790, is now a lieutenant-colonel in his Majesty's forces, and commands men who were grey-headed in the service, before he was born.

† It is not from what we behold in St. James's-street, or on the Parade that we are to judge of the army; were we to dive into the recesses of the King's Bench or the Fleet, those receptacles of woe would be found to owe much of their population to our military system.

tune of some exalted rival, the child, the parasite, or the pandar of nobility.

The abuses of our ecclesiastical department are so thoroughly known, that any attempt to prove them, would needlessly encroach on the patience of our readers ; we only therefore state a few particulars—First ; The perpetual discontents arising from tythes, attack the very corner stone of the foundation ; they implant sentiments of hatred and animosity, where those of peace and affection ought ever to reside. Second ; The powerful hope of translation has the strongest tendency to make political intrigue the substitute for virtue, learning, and an assiduous attention to the episcopal functions. Third ; The extreme inequality of the benefices of inferior clergymen, together with the paltry stipends allowed to curates, involve the greater part of the order in poverty and contempt.—We would softly hint a fear, that the great patronage of the crown calls forth more exertion of talent in electioneering manœuvres, than in works of peace and holiness.

The state of the civil list and household, next claims our attention.

The honorary servants of his Majesty's household, peers and commoners, and simple gentlemen, are upwards of one hundred. If we estimate their salaries on an average at five hundred pounds, here is, what I must call, a superfluous
expence

expence of fifty thousand pounds per annum. The deputies, clerks, assistants, &c. we do not know how to enumerate.*

Some time ago a deduction was to be made from all salaries exceeding fifty pounds per annum. It would have occurred in any other place, that the most eligible mode was to make a diminished payment into the office appointed to transact the business of salaries. But no—Another *place* was to be made, and the office of “ receiver of the deductions ” arose.

* An instance or two may evince the nature of the civil list. —One of the daughters of George the Second, it is said, requested her father’s permission to have her apartment papered. The king answered, “ he could not afford it.” Not afford it! the expence could not exceed ten pounds! “ That might be,” returned the king in the case of a common person, “ but I assure you it would cost *me* one thousand.” The articles of the account might probably stand thus :

To A. B. Esq. M. P. for borough C. surveyor of					
the princesses apartment	—	—	—		300
To Mr. J. D. deputy surveyor of the princesses					
apartment for himself and two clerks	—	—			150
To Mr. F. K. chief paperer	—	—	—		150
Deputy paperer	—	—	—	—	50
To K. W. Esq. member for the county of N. comp-					
troller of the works in the princesses apartment,					
for himself	—	—	—	—	300
Board wages for 12 servants for a month	—	—			40
Paper, paste, and a workman for four days	—	—			10
				Total £.	1000

The physicians, ordinary and extraordinary, are about ten ; surgeons eleven ; oculists and dentists six or seven. Whence we might infer that their Majesties household equalled in number five populous cities, together with the adjacent villages, allowing two physicians to each—or that (which God forbid) a pestilential disorder never ceased to rage within the royal premises. His Majesty's housekeepers are in number eight. The rangers and deputy rangers twenty. Her Majesty's honorary female attendants are near thirty. Her Majesty too has her gentlemen ushers, pages of the presence, pages assistants, treasurer, secretary, &c. &c. &c. The whole number of royal servants amounts to nearly two thousand.*

What can be the use, what the comfort of these excessive appendages to the royal establishment? If it could be proved, that they tended in the least to promote the happiness or encrease the pleasure of a prince we so justly respect, no good subject would repine at their extravagance. But when we have reason to believe, that they are no

* No one would be more unwilling than myself to take away the livelihood of any set of men however useless. Nor would I give my fiat to any reform which did not continue all the salaries of the present place holders ;—the expence to the nation is nothing when compared to the misery of so many individuals.

ways acceptable to his Majesty; that his income is expended on palaces which he never enters, and lavished on persons whom he cannot know, and whom if he did know he would certainly despise, this enormous patronage seems converted against the personage, whose splendor it was instituted to augment. It becomes, when added to the patronage of the other departments of the state, a formidable engine* to operate upon an obedient majority, erects the minister and his adherents into a species of fourth estate, and enables him to set at defiance the sovereign and the people.

Of the state of our poor and of our poor laws, a more extended account may perhaps hereafter be given, than at present we find convenient. It may suffice to say, that bill after bill has been brought into the house, and each in its turn rejected. Whether it is that the miseries of the poor make them dependant on the rich, or that the rich extend not the circle of humanity beyond that of affluence, I will not presume to determine. A radical defect must certainly exist somewhere in the institution or execution of these laws, since a greater sum is annually raised by parliament for their support than maintains the whole establishment

* This was nearly being compleatly verified in the year 1783, when an aristocratic faction equally odious to king and people had seized the reins of government.

civil and military of some kingdoms ; and asylums, workhouses, &c. are opened in every parish, at a great expence to the inhabitants for the reception of the indigent ; yet our streets are infested with innumerable beggars, who prefer the precarious profits of mendicity to the certain provision assigned them by law.

I may be permitted to take it for granted, that the most strenuous defender of present measures will not ask me to point out the necessity of reform in our law, and in the mode of practising it. If I am told that our present legislature is adequate to the correction of abuse in every department, I ask, will those who exist by abuses destroy them ? In some branches, in the law for instance, a noble lord may not be much injured by a reform ; his nephew, may be clerk of the King's Bench ; his cousin Custos Brevium ; or the brother of his favourite mistress, a Master in Chancery. Suppose this little objection removed, his lordship will argue thus : Let us not touch upon the minutest abuses ; there is no possibility of saying to a reformer, thus far shalt thou go and no farther. He will then immediately exert his eloquence, his chicanery, and what is still more efficacious, his influence, to prevent the most salutary reform that can be proposed. If a person the least liable to be affected can reason in this manner, what have we expect from those

Lords

Lords and Commons whose great consequence depends on the continuation of abuse. And experience has shewn us that we must cease to look to them for the accomplishment of these reforms, unless they are seconded by such energies from without, as shall silence the voice of influence within.*

There is a consideration worthy of the attention of our rulers, if they really feel as much regard for the happiness and tranquillity of the country as they profess. It is asserted by many, that the people of England have a strong monarchical propensity, that is, a general tendency to maintain the Constitution as it was established at the Revolution. Administration coincides with the doctrine, and in their speeches roundly maintains it. If this be founded in fact, or if they really believe what they assert, where can lie the danger of permitting a moderate plan of reform in every department of the State, but more particularly of the parliamentary representation, to be proposed, and adopted thro' the medium of temperate discussion? The people, satisfied with the flourishing state of pub-

* We would not be understood to allude from the expression of energy from without to any violence or sedition; we solely mean by it, "the people exerting themselves constitutionally in order to obtain a pure representation."

lic affairs, and placing a boundless confidence in those who at present dispense the favours of the Crown, will receive it with gratitude, and instead of being betrayed into excesses, the too usual concomitants of change, will attribute the concessions of Government to its patriotism, not to its fears, and repay it with new and unequivocal proofs of esteem and affection. Let tyrants tremble at the name of reform, and shut their gates against its approaches; but those who are obeyed less from a sense of duty than of love, in admitting it, only open a door to new triumph, and the most exquisite gratifications which hearts glowing with patriotic ardor can receive.

If on the contrary, the reverse of the medal is the true representation of the popular mind, that the people of England, weary of their mixed Constitution, admire the simplicity of a Republic, that they no longer look with reverence to institutions sanctified by antiquity, and to distinctions not founded on the basis of public utility; if, as it pleases some to affirm, this statement be true, I will appeal in the name of Prudence, of Common Sense, or what is still more powerful, of Interest, to our legislators, to know by what means they can pretend to stop the current of public opinion. Even granting that they are able to crush every plan of reformation,

mation that can be proposed, and that no open discontents shall consequently ensue, let it be remembered that five years will bring them to the awful period of their dissolution, and let them then meet their constituents with what appetite they may.

The Minister is therefore placed in a dilemma, from which he can only extricate himself by restoring the Constitution to its pristine purity, by acceding to the wishes of every good citizen. Survey the state of things in every point of view ; let aristocracy or democracy predominate, the necessity of a speedy reform is self-evident.

I will content myself with throwing out a few general hints of the mode of reform which may be adopted.—Though our present provincial division may give rise to some slight inequality in representation, the evil is nothing compared with those which would attend a new modelling of districts. It signifies little, if in one place ten thousand, in another eleven, send a representative. I propose then, that every town containing ten thousand inhabitants shall send two members to the Lower House—every town containing above twenty thousand three—every town containing above forty thousand four—London ten—Westminster ten—and every county shall send a number proportionate to its popula-

tion. This plan may appear to some too favourable to the inhabitants of towns. But it is to be considered, that they are much more enlightened, and much less under control than the inhabitants of the country. The tyrannical influence and interference practised by country gentlemen over their tenants, and even the servants of their tenants, render a county election little more than an internal contest of the lesser aristocracy. Also those who live in towns have much greater opportunities of knowing the real conduct and views of their representative. The dispersed electors of a county member, scarce see, or even hear of him, except at his septennial visit. The absurd custom of voting as holder of land in this county, and again, as possessor of a franchise in that town, should for ever be put an end to. It is not land or franchises which are represented, but men. The method of giving a vote for a county should be by enrolling names in the several parishes where the voters reside*. By this means all tumult, drunkenness, expence, and loss of labour, will be avoided.

And here I must indulge myself with a word at parting with the Minister. I have before observed, that his abilities command my respect,

* And in no case any vote to be given except at the place of the voters usual residence.

and

mation that can be proposed, and that no open discontents shall consequently ensue, let it be remembered that five years will bring them to the awful period of their dissolution, and let them then meet their constituents with what appetite they may.

The Minister is therefore placed in a dilemma, from which he can only extricate himself by restoring the Constitution to its pristine purity, by acceding to the wishes of every good citizen. Survey the state of things in every point of view ; let aristocracy or democracy predominate, the necessity of a speedy reform is self-evident.

I will content myself with throwing out a few general hints of the mode of reform which may be adopted.—Though our present provincial division may give rise to some slight inequality in representation, the evil is nothing compared with those which would attend a new modelling of districts. It signifies little, if in one place ten thousand, in another eleven, send a representative. I propose then, that every town containing ten thousand inhabitants shall send two members to the Lower House—every town containing above twenty thousand three—every town containing above forty thousand four—London ten—Westminster ten—and every county shall send a number proportionate to its population.

tion. This plan may appear to some too favourable to the inhabitants of towns. But it is to be considered, that they are much more enlightened, and much less under control than the inhabitants of the country. The tyrannical influence and interference practised by country gentlemen over their tenants, and even the servants of their tenants, render a county election little more than an internal contest of the lesser aristocracy. Also those who live in towns have much greater opportunities of knowing the real conduct and views of their representative. The dispersed electors of a county member, scarce see, or even hear of him, except at his septennial visit. The absurd custom of voting as holder of land in this county, and again, as possessor of a franchise in that town, should for ever be put an end to. It is not land or franchises which are represented, but men. The method of giving a vote for a county should be by enrolling names in the several parishes where the voters reside*. By this means all tumult, drunkenness, expence, and loss of labour, will be avoided.

And here I must indulge myself with a word at parting with the Minister. I have before observed, that his abilities command my respect,

* And in no case any vote to be given except at the place of the voters usual residence.

and

and his virtues my esteem. Did I think less highly of his character, what I am going to remark would be inefficient, and therefore absurd. There has been a practice lately adopted by his adherents, in the highest degree illiberal, and I hope unknown to him : It is that of confounding the friends to reform with the enemies of the Constitution ; of placing a Grey, a Lambton, and a Stanhope, in the same class with a Barlow, a Marat, a Robertspierre ; of aspersing a most learned and respectable body of our fellow-citizens, who have long endured a privation of the rights dearest to mankind with exemplary patience, and unshaken loyalty, and even rendering their persons and property insecure, by the dissemination of inflammatory writings among the deluded populace. The outrages committed at Birmingham in 1791, shew the deplorable effects of this miserable policy, and the probable rejection of every plan of parliamentary reform, will be a consummation of its mischief. If Mr. Pitt approves of associations to preserve our persons and property, it is incumbent on him to express his disapprobation of a conduct which tends to extinguish patriotism, to annihilate charity, and to oppress a large proportion of useful and industrious citizens.

Thus, I have delineated the real powers and excellencies of our constitution ; I have traced
through

through either house the extent of corruption, and proved it to be omnipotent. I have, in opposition to those who blindly applaud every thing which is, shewn that influence within gives rise to abundant evil without ; I have, lastly, pointed out constitutional exertions for a parliamentary reform, to be the sole means of purity and renovation.

In this undertaking I have been actuated by no other motive than a most ardent desire to promote the happiness of the society to which I glory in belonging. I am not to be found on the terrace of Windsor, or in the pavilion of Brighthelmstone ; neither is my name enrolled among the friends of the people, nor in the associations which are formed against imaginary and undefineable dangers. *Mihi, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, nec injuriâ nec beneficio cogniti.*

AN OLD WHIG.

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